

# Reporting on obesity? Please be respectful.

## Obesity stigma is harmful

The word obesity is loaded with stigma, blame and shame. This stigma is unfair, a barrier to action and harmful.

Obesity stigma is associated with considerable physical and mental health consequences, including increased depression and anxiety, disordered eating, and decreased self-esteem. Weight bias also translates into inequities in employment settings, health care services, and educational attainment.

Obesity Stigma arises from the lack of understanding around the many drivers of obesity, including strong social, biological and environmental factors, which are outside of people's control. It is not all about failure of personal responsibility.

## Media portrayal of obesity is important

The media plays an important role in developing or perpetuating the public's views on obesity. Unfortunately, stigmatising images and framing have been used to report on obesity in Australia and globally and have reinforced stereotypes. This needs to stop.

Images with cut off heads, bulging bare bellies, eating huge portions and lying around/being inactive are dehumanising, degrading and driving harmful obesity stigma.

## Respectful images, framing and language

Images should portray people with obesity as normal, with dignity and doing everyday things. The images should not include some aspect of blame for obesity that would further harmful stereotypes (e.g. eating unhealthy food, huge portions or lying around).

As with all health conditions, person-first language should be used, including 'people with obesity' or 'living with obesity' instead of 'obese.'

It is important to include and speak with those that have a lived experience. People who have experienced obesity should be asked to share their stories and perspectives.

Reporting should be balanced and recognise that there is no one cause or one solution for obesity. It is unhelpful and incorrect to frame this important societal challenge as just the fault of individuals. Shaming and blaming does not make things better. Quite the reverse.

## Examples of stigmatising images:

Headless:



Oversized portions:



Bare bulging bellies:



Lying around:



## Examples of more respectful images:



*[Please click here for further information, guidance and image gallery options.](#)*